

*The following are Pastor David's responses to questions that are often asked when pastors take sabbaticals, and his answers to questions that you might be wondering about his sabbatical:*

**What is a sabbatical?**

The primary purpose of a sabbatical is for a prolonged season of self-care and *sabbath* rest. In the Christian tradition, it is for devoting a period of time to personal reflection, renewal, and rest. Typically, sabbaticals are one to six months long, with *three* being standard practice.

**Why do pastors take sabbaticals?**

Pastoral work is extremely stressful, and a lack of physical and spiritual rest is especially hazardous to the effectiveness of pastoral ministry. While it's true that many people work hard and have stressful jobs, pastors carry a responsibility that is greater than most occupations. Due to current technology, pastors are easily accessible to *hundreds* of people. Also, pastors are held to the highest standard of mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Rightly so. The work of a pastor is sacred. After hours of study each week, they minister through the preaching of the Scriptures in worship. They marry, bury, and baptize. They give counsel, cry with others, and confront sin. They not only carry the burdens of their own families, but they also carry the stress and burdens of dozens within their church. In addition, pastors are highly visible figures and always on call. As public leaders, while they may receive praise from time to time, they are soft targets for the frustrations and criticisms of others. As spiritual caretakers and shepherds of the church, they are also targeted by spiritual evil. The challenges that come with this work never ends. And so, when pastors aren't healthy, it impacts his/her family, the staff, and the entire congregation. Without proper rest and soul care, pastors today face an [increasing risk of burnout](#). Therefore, it is wise to be proactive and support pastors with sabbaticals.

**What is the Brethren in Christ (BIC) policy for taking sabbaticals?**

According to guidance given in 2014 by the Brethren in Christ US, full-time pastors are eligible for a sabbatical after *seven* consecutive years of service in one congregation. They may take leave with a commitment to give one year of further service in the same congregation. In addition, the policy for the Susquehanna Conference states the following: "The pastor will continue to receive full compensation and benefits during the time of their sabbatical."

**Has Grantham Church had pastors take sabbaticals in the past?**

Yes. The last pastor that qualified for a sabbatical was Dr. Terry Brensinger (2007). Pastor Brensinger received a large grant from the National Clergy Renewal Program (Lily Endowment) for a 4-month sabbatical to study and write at the Jerusalem Ecumenical Institute.

**Have you received any guidance on taking your sabbatical?**

Yes, I have. I have sought counsel and guidance from our bishop, older pastors, and my spiritual director. I have also read material and used sabbatical resources in the discernment process. For example, I found this sabbatical [introduction and guide](#) from *Soul Shepherding* helpful.

**When does your sabbatical begin and end?**

My sabbatical will begin on Wednesday, May 1st and end on Wednesday, July 31st, 2024.

**What is your vision or overarching purpose for your sabbatical?**

While some pastors or academics may use their time to write a book, begin doctoral work, or travel to Europe, my sabbatical is primarily designed to be a time of personal rest and renewal. Overall, my first seven years at Grantham have been a real blessing to me and my family. But there have also been some difficult days, especially through 2020-2021. And now that these challenges are behind us, and the church is in a healthy place, I feel that my first sabbatical should be a time to cease from pastoral ministry, reflect on our experiences, deepen my prayer life, and listen for God's voice. My sabbatical will be an intentional time of drawing near to God.

**Is there a Bible passage that could serve as a theme to guide your sabbatical?**

Matthew 11:28-30 NIV – Jesus said: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

**What will you do to rest and receive spiritual nourishment during your sabbatical?**

I will be sleeping more, praying more, reading more, and listening to music more. I will look at my smart phone less. I will work around the house, in the garden, go on hikes, journal, and spend time alone with God. I will also meet with my spiritual director throughout my sabbatical.

**Who will be leading the staff and fulfilling your responsibilities while you're gone?**

Pastor Melissa Lowther (Discipleship Pastor) will move into the lead position on our staff and give oversight of all church ministries. She will preach some and be available to all ministry commissions. She will also meet with the Church Board at the May and June meetings. Tom George will continue to give leadership and oversight to the [Grantham Church Care Teams](#).

**Who will be preaching on the Sundays you're away?**

I have formed a preaching team from our congregation to share the work of filling the pulpit.

**Where will you be worshipping on Sunday mornings? And what about your family?**

I will use my Sundays away to visit area churches whose pastors are members of the Capital Region Gospel Partnership, as well as some other churches in the Harrisburg area. My wife and boys will still be worshipping with Grantham Church on most Sundays during my sabbatical.

**Will you interact with members at Grantham Church on your sabbatical?**

There will be a few friends that I remain in contact with during this time, but not in a work capacity. My connections with any members will not be in my role as pastor, but as a friend.

**Should we be concerned about you looking for another lead pastor job?**

Absolutely not. Not only does the denomination not allow sabbaticals for this purpose, but I would not do that to our congregation. While sabbaticals involve discernment and thinking about the future, my plan is to seek rest and renewal to envision the next season of ministry.

**What should the congregation do while you're on sabbatical?**

Please pray for me and my family. Pray that I will rest in the Lord, experience a closeness to him, and be renewed in my calling. You can also pray for our staff and church leadership. And finally, keep worshipping with Grantham, deepening your faith, giving regularly, and serving each other. May you be filled with the Spirit as you continue to lead others to the God who looks like Jesus.